

How to Win Sweepstakes on Facebook and Twitter

Tricks from the Contest Queen

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Sweepstakes have entered the Internet era—entries are submitted online through company Web sites or, increasingly, through companies' Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest social-media pages.

This means that you can use Internet tools to search for appealing promotional giveaways and use form-filling programs such as *Roboform Everywhere* to dramatically reduce the time that it takes to enter (a free version is available or you can pay \$20 annually for additional features, Roboform.com).

Online sweepstakes prizes can be significant. For example, the cable channel HGTV gives away a house each year in its Dream Home Giveaway (HGTV.com/dream-home).

To take full advantage of online sweepstakes, you must know how to find the best ones for you and how to increase your odds of winning...

FINDING SWEEPSTAKES

Sweepstakes aggregator sites, including Online-Sweepstakes.com and PowerSweepstaking.com, provide links to hundreds of current sweepstakes. They also filter out most of the scams. My site, ContestQueen.com, includes links to dozens of resources (from the "Resources" menu, choose "U.S. Resources," then "Find Sweepstakes," followed by "Sweepstakes Aggregates" or "Sweepstakes Newsletters"). Settle on one or two resources that you find easy to use. Also...

Set up a Google Alert for the word "sweepstakes" together with your state or city. This should turn up regional sweepstakes, which typically

attract fewer entrants and thus offer better odds than national drawings. Set up a second Google Alert for the phrase "open only to residents of [YOUR STATE]" as well.

To set up a Google Alert: Select "Even More" from the "More" menu at the top of the Google.com page, then select "Alerts" from the "Specialize Search" section and follow the directions. You will receive e-mail alerts whenever Web pages containing your keywords appear.

Sign up for the e-newsletters of companies and brands that you especially like, too—these sometimes include sweepstakes. (Have these sent to an e-mail address that you've set up specifically for sweepstakes so that your main e-mail account isn't flooded with contest-related e-mails or spam.)

Consider subscribing to a sweepstakes e-newsletter. Many of them specialize in sweepstakes not found on the sweepstakes aggregators such as mail-in or regional sweepstakes. SweepingAmerica.com specializes in mail-in and text sweepstakes (\$60 annually for weekly e-mails plus alerts), and IWinContests.com specializes in short-entry-period and regional giveaways, which, as pointed out above, tend to attract fewer entrants and >>

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Carolyn Wilman, editor of the ContestQueen.com Web site and author of *You Can't Win If You Don't Enter* (BookSurge). She runs sweepstakes seminars in the US and Canada. She also consults with businesses about running effective sweepstakes.

»» thus offer better odds of winning (\$15 annually for weekly e-mails).

WINNING TIPS

Winning strategies for today's social-media-based sweepstakes...

Facebook features more sweepstakes than any other social-media site. To enter, you typically must "Like" the page of the company or brand offering the sweepstakes, then fill out a short online entry form.

Example: Kraft and Procter & Gamble frequently run Facebook sweepstakes—but you usually will find them on the Facebook pages of these companies' brands and products, not on their general corporate pages.

Strategy: Read Facebook sweepstakes' rules carefully—sometimes you can earn extra entries, thereby increasing your odds of winning, by sharing the promotion with your Facebook friends.

Twitter sweepstakes often are very short-term—many close within a few hours. Short entry periods mean fewer entries and better odds of winning. The prizes tend to be modest, however—the value might be just \$20 to \$50. Twitter sweepstakes typically are very easy to enter—usually just a matter of retweeting the sweepstakes tweet or answering a single question.

Example: Book publishers, movie theater chains and movie studios frequently give away books and movie tickets through Twitter sweepstakes.

Strategy: The key to winning Twitter sweepstakes is finding them before they close—aggregator sites often don't list them in time. Follow businesses you like that have run Twitter sweepstakes in the past, then skim their Twitter feeds on a smartphone whenever you have a moment that would otherwise go to waste, such as when standing in line at the store.

Pinterest sweepstakes often require entrants to create special Pinterest pages or follow complex rules. That can hold down the number of entrants, increasing your odds of winning—but it also means that entering could take hours.

Strategy: Skim the sweepstakes rules to determine whether the winner will be selected by judges evaluating entrants' Pinterest pages or by a random drawing. If it is a random drawing, there's no need to invest a lot of time in your entry.

Example: Mrs. T's Pierogies recently ran a "Re-Pin to Win" Pinterest sweepstakes with a grand prize of \$1,000 and a year's supply of pierogies. The winner was selected by random drawing (Pinterest.com/MrsTsPierogies). **BLP**